

U.S. Tuna Tracking and Verification Plan

- To ensure that the “dolphin-safe” label is accurate for tuna purchased by the public, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has developed a plan for tracking and verifying the dolphin-safe or non-dolphin-safe condition of tuna caught in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP). The tracking system is based on keeping dolphin-safe tuna separated from non-dolphin safe tuna from capture through processing.
- To do this, NMFS regulations require that dolphin-safe tuna be stored only in designated dolphin-safe storage wells aboard purse seine fishing vessels, and that non-dolphin-safe tuna will be stored only in designated non-dolphin-safe wells identified by well number throughout unloading, transshipping, weigh in, storage, and canning at processing plants.
- Every purse seine tuna vessel greater than 400 short tons carrying capacity fishing for yellowfin tuna in the ETP must have an Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) observer aboard the vessel to oversee every fishing trip. In addition to other duties, the observer records information on one of two Tuna Tracking Forms (TTFs) every time the purse seine net is set on a school of tuna, depending on whether the set is dolphin-safe or not (a set in which dolphins are seriously injured or killed). The information recorded after each set includes: 1) date and time of the set; 2) well number; 3) dolphin-safe or non-dolphin safe status of the set; 4) estimated weights of yellowfin, skipjack, bigeye, and other fish caught in the set; 5) comments if any; and 6) initials of the observer and the chief engineer of the vessel. At the end of the trip, the observer and the vessel captain sign the completed forms certifying that the TTFs are complete and accurate to the best of their knowledge.
- NMFS is notified of the location and expected time of arrival of all U.S. vessels completing fishing trips in the ETP. A NMFS representative meets the vessel at the dock to oversee offloading if there are any non-dolphin-safe tuna on board. If the entire catch is dolphin-safe, NMFS may or may not meet the vessel at the dock. The vessel owner or management is responsible for sending the TTFs to the NMFS tuna tracking and verification program office. Upon receipt and review of the TTFs, NMFS issues a dolphin-safe certificate to the vessel owner/management that can be supplied to foreign as well as domestic canners requesting such documentation (in lieu of the vessel supplying the foreign canner copies of the confidential TTFs).

Receiving Reports

- U.S. processors are required to notify NMFS of all expected deliveries of ETP-caught tuna from other nations’ vessels and to provide a copy of the processor’s receiving report to the NMFS representative, if present. If a NMFS representative is not present, the processor must submit a copy of the processor’s receiving report to NMFS by mail or fax within five working days. The processor’s receiving report must contain, at a minimum: 1) date of delivery; 2) catcher vessel name and flag; 3) trip number and dates; 4) storage container number(s); 4) dolphin-safe or non-dolphin-safe designation of each container; 5) species; 6) product description; 7) and weight of tuna in each container.
- To track the dolphin-safe status of tuna imports, all tuna products except fresh tuna that are imported or sold into the United States must be accompanied by a properly certified Fisheries Certificate of Origin (NOAA Form 370). In some cases, an additional certification signed by a representative of a nation participating in the International Dolphin Conservation Program is required to document the dolphin-safe status of the shipment.

Monthly Submissions

- U.S. processors are required to submit three monthly reports of processing activity: 1) a report of all tuna received at U.S. processing facilities in each month whether or not the tuna is actually canned or stored during that month; 2) subset detailed report of tuna harvested in the ETP; 3) cold storage removal report of ETP source tuna including the date of removal; storage container number(s); dolphin-safe or non-dolphin-safe designation of each container; details of the disposition of fish (for example, canning, sale, rejection). Monthly cannery receipt reports must contain the following information: species, condition (round, loin, dressed, gilled and gutted, other); weight; ocean area of capture; catcher vessel and trip dates; carrier name; unloading dates; and unloading location.

Dolphin-Safe Verification

- Verification procedures for all required information submissions are included in the NMFS tuna tracking regulations. The United States may verify fishing reports by the use of IATTC data and verify processor or importer reports by reviewing company records. Routine follow-up of NOAA Form 370 documents is conducted on an as-needed basis. Random purchases of canned tuna in various locations around the country are made to trace them back through processing and ultimately to harvest to verify the dolphin-safe condition of the tuna. To date, spot checks have been initiated for tuna products randomly purchased in 13 states.